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THE BRITISH EVOLUTION

By William Henry Chamberlin

Old customs die hard in England. A Labor Member of Parliament may be redder than the rose in his economic views. But when he enters and leaves the floor of the House he bows just as meticulously to the Speaker, who wears the traditional wig, as does the most rock-ribbed Conservative. The Lord Chancellor still sits on a woolsack in memory of the far-off days when wool was one of Great Britain's principal exports.

The colorful ceremony of changing the guard in front of one of the royal palaces always attracts an appreciative crowd. In fact, any display of pageantry seems more popular than ever in a capital which still bears the scars of war in the shape of demolished and damaged houses in almost every block and where the people, as regards food and clothing and the little amenities of life, are kept on a regime of drab austerity.

But if many of the external sides of British life show little change, apart from the general impoverishment, no one can be in London very long without becoming conscious that profoundly important social and economic changes have taken place. It has proved possible without violence or bloodshed to bring about a very considerable redistribution of wealth and power, and a vast amount of leveling. There is far more equality in England today, as regards the distribution of food and clothing, than there is in the Soviet Union.

A predominantly Conservative coalition government during the war imposed on the country, with a very fair degree of success, about as complete equality in the distribution of food and clothing as could be imagined. It is one of the many paradoxes of Europe today that in France a Cabinet largely composed of Communists and Socialists has completely failed to impose rationing with anything like the stern British rigidity, with the result that the amount and quality of a man's meal in Paris depends primarily on the size of his bankroll.

This is emphatically not the case in Great Britain. As I learned from personal experience, the most atrocious food is often served in the most elegant clubs. The meat allowance of the Savoy or Dorchester Hotels is only half what is allotted to a factory canteen. There is a small black market, of course, and individuals with surplus cash can

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pay astronomical prices for unrationed luxuries like cigars, liquors, peaches and grapes. But in general, British families, apart from those who live in the country or who have good rural connections, are living largely on a common rationed diet which may be sufficient to avoid malnutrition but for which the familiar adjectives "dull" and "austere" seem masterpieces of English understatement.

The same rule of austere equality is enforced in clothing. Here again, the coupons which entitle the holder to purchase articles of clothing are more important than currency.

II

When one further considers that no income in Great Britain can now legally exceed £6,000 (about $24,000); that the income tax collector takes three-quarters of the earnings of a man with a salary of £5,000; that at present no house costing more than $4,800 ($5,200 in London) may be built; it is clear that the leveling process has gone pretty far.

And this enormous social change has come about in typical, unspectacular British fashion, without benefit of guillotine or purge. It has not even been the result of the advent of the Labor Government last year, although Labor philosophy strongly favors equalization. The severe rationing of food and clothing was introduced as an indispensable measure when Great Britain was in the position of a besieged city.

Labor came into power as the result of a completely free election on July 5, 1945. The British press is just as free to criticize the Labor Government as the American press was to criticize the New Deal and newspapers like the Express, the Mail and the Telegraph can be depended on to make the most of every real or alleged case of bureaucratic bungling.

Thus the legally almost unlimited power of the Labor majority in Parliament is subjected to the restraining influence of free public opinion. It would be politically almost impossible for the Government to indulge in any rash experiments which would worsen an already painfully low standard of living and bring retribution at the next elections.

The principal causes of the Labor victory were the instinctive desire for a change after a long period of Conservative rule, fear of the return of mass unemployment, the war-weariness of many of the soldiers and the cumulative effect of more than 40 years of patient Labor organization and propaganda.

Also, Britain, a small compact island with a large food deficit and without great mineral wealth except coal, a country very dependent on foreign trade, takes more naturally to the idea of economic regulation and control by government than does America, with its vast internal resources and comparative self-sufficiency. Many British conservatives

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take their stand not on "free enterprise", in the American sense, but on the idea that there should be a close working partnership between government and industry.

III

The actual worsening of the food situation, reflected in the introduction of bread rationing, the cuts in feed for poultry and livestock, the weakness and scarcity of beer, have not helped the popularity of the Labor Government. And very few of the houses which the Health Minister, Mr. Aneurin Bevan, proposes to build on a large scale with cheap rents subsidized out of government and local funds, have emerged as yet from the blueprint stage.

But there is no convincing sign of a turn in the tide of popular favor. Barring an international crisis which would lead to the formation of a coalition government, or a positively catastrophic turn in domestic affairs, there is every prospect that the Labor Government, with its solid, well-disciplined majority in Parliament, can finish out as much of its permissible five-year term of office as it desires.

This will mean, in all probability, the first instalment of Socialism which the Labor Party promised in its election manifesto. The Bank of England and the coal mines have already been nationalized and during the next two or three years gas and electricity, railways and inland transport, iron and steel will also probably be taken over, with compensation to the present stockholders, and operation by public boards.

The next parliamentary election, which may well take place about 1948, if there is no unforeseen crisis in the meantime, should prove one of the most interesting in British history. For then the British people, on the basis of concrete experience, will vote for a continuation or slowing down or reversal of the present strong trend toward a collectivist society.

Labor is likely to stand or fall on its record of practical achievement in providing more and better food, clothing and housing, improving the efficiency of the socialized industries, regaining for Great Britain some of the ground it has lost because of the accumulation of debt and the diminution of foreign investments and markets during the war. Just now exports are booming. It is a world sellers' market and almost anything can be sold almost anywhere at almost any price. But some of the more thoughtful economic observers here believe that a severe test will come in about three years, when the first fruits of the American loan will have been consumed.

IV

There is some ideology, but a good deal more elementary British na-

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tional interest, in Labor foreign policy. The small pro-Communist wing in the Labor Party does not affect Foreign Minister Bevin much more than a buzzing fly would disturb an elephant. Uncritical pro-Russian sympathy has declined in Great Britain as it has in America, and for much the same reasons. Mr. Molotov has been his own worst enemy. Even Englishmen who do not agree with the philosophy of the Labor movement admit that the present regime has rendered great services to national unity and that Mr. Bevin has rallied a united public opinion more effectively than any Conservative Foreign Minister could have done.

The attitude of the Labor Government is determined by the regrettable but unmistakable necessity of taking defensive measures against the unlimited expansionist designs of the Kremlin, and also by an imperative British interest in keeping open vital maritime communications. Nevertheless, in confronting Indian and Egyptian unrest, the Labor Government has struck a new and enlightened note.

There are of course within the Labor Party the familiar types who are called fellow-travellers in the United States and crypto-Communists in Great Britain. A more significant current is represented by the group which finds an organ of expression in the lively and combative weekly Tribune, to which George Orwell, author of the delightful satire "Animal Farm", contributes regularly. This group, which includes the Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan, his wife, Jennie Lee, and the Daily Herald commentator, Michael Foot, would like to see England pursue a middle way between Wall Street and the Kremlin, taking the lead in a socialist reconstruction of Western Europe.

But the immediate aims of British foreign policy seem more prosaic and less theoretical. There is a desire to secure maritime communication through the Mediterranean and Suez, to promote a treatment of Germany which would be both more rational and more humane, to build up a western security area while still bargaining for some freedom of commercial access to the countries in the Soviet area in Eastern Europe. A good illustration of Bevin's direct method is his reported comment on Molotov's elaborate request for Eritrea: "Tell 'im 'e can't 'ave it."

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William Henry Chamberlin, a regular contributor to HUMAN EVENTS, sends this Analysis from London. It will be followed, at intervals, by other Chamberlin articles written for us from various European centers.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. III, NO. 32

By Frank C. Hanighen August 7, 1946

The old tag "things are not what they seem" has particular relevance to two speeches delivered in all solemnity by world statesmen during the past week. Molotov launched a bitter attack on Franco at the opening of the 21-nation Peace Conference in Paris. Innocents and fellow-travellers were moved to applause at this reaffirmation of Soviet enmity for the "Fascist untouchable" on the Continent. The newspaper PM showed satisfaction in 11-point type; Congressman Coffee (see page 2) doubtless found consolation for his other troubles.

Actually, diplomatic circles in Washington believe that Molotov's verbal assault was really a rude reminder to Franco that, unless he plays ball with Soviet Russia, Moscow has a long-term program for his overthrow. In short, there is a strong conviction that Russia is trying to deal direct with Franco. This thesis is strengthened by two pieces of evidence: (1) the fact that Russia has imported in the last month $1,150,000 worth of Barcelona textiles via Iran; and (2) a reliable report that conversations are taking place in the International Zone of Tangier between the Soviet emissary there and Franco agents.

This Russian disposition to talk with a Government which Moscow has tried, with no little success, to make a pariah among nations does not necessarily mean that the talks will end in an agreement like that which Stalin recently concluded with Perón. But it does indicate that Soviet Russia has become a competitor of the Anglo-Americans in negotiations wih Madrid. At least, this new factor may enable the Spanish Government to raise its price in bargaining with London and Washington. Moscow has reason to fear that the Western Allies will reach a satisfactory solution of the Spanish problem this summer and would like to put a spoke in the wheel. As for the propriety of the leader of the "Anti-Fascist" movement dealing with "Fascist Spain" -- it is well to recall that Stalin, while publicly reviling Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1939, had no inhibitions about negotiating secretly with Berlin and finally concluding the Soviet-Nazi pact which immediately preceded the invasion of Poland.

The other speech was delivered by President Perón on August 1. The enfant terrible of this hemisphere startled American capitals by proclaiming that in the next war Argentina would not remain neutral, but would fight on the side of the United States and other American republics. This certainly represents an olive branch tendered in the direction of Washington. But it would be a mistake to think that the caudillo is thereby delivering himself into our hands. For it is possible to state definitely that Perón has asked Soviet Russia to sell him captured German arms. The request is at present being discussed by the two Governments.

Nor is that all. It can be revealed that the Argentine Government has been negotiating with the Swedish arms firm of Bofors for the manufacture of a large order of arms. Washington has learned of these negotiations and has protested to the Swedish Government, arguing that such a sale would destroy the uniformity of gauges in inter-American arms, an objective towards which the War Department has been working in its plans for Inter-American defense. The Swedes have reportedly answered that this is a matter for both Buenos Aires and Washington to decide. Bofors is said to be proceeding with the deal despite the protest.

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The scandals uncovered by the Mead Investigating Committee, while they are depressing evidence of the corruption caused by war, have one encouraging corollary. It is pointed out that these exposures have started much sooner after the end of

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World War II than were those which followed World War I. It was about three years before investigation of the scandals of World War I began; this time the news has been broken before the first anniversary of V-J Day. Senator Mead and his committee are to be congratulated.

Another difference is noted between last time and this; at least so far. In the scandals after World War I, those entangled in the muckraking net were preponderantly Republicans and conservatives. Today, the searchlight of Mead has caught both Right and Left. Congressman May, the center of the publicity, has been a conservative Democrat. But it is noted that Congressman Sabath (Ill.), prominent New Dealer, was acquainted with members of the Garsson companies in the May case. And it is also charged that New Deal Congressman Coffee (Wash.) received $2,500 from a contractor as payment for services in helping the latter get a Government contract. Mr. Coffee denied this, saying the payment was a campaign contribution, but the propriety as well as legality of the transaction remains questionable.

Mr. Coffee is a member of the "Leftist bloc" in the House, voting often with Marcantonio, De Lacy, et al. He has been unusually vocal in attacking the morality of General Franco and in demanding that troops be brought home from China -- demands which parallel those in the Daily Worker. Mr. Sabath has been mentioned in connection with a number of Leftist committees. These indeed are men of the Left. But it is quite possible that men of the Right may suffer from pitiless publicity ere long. Some Washington observers expect exposures which will involve Republicans, conservatives and "Big Business", in preparation for the Administration's bid for Left Wing votes in the November elections.

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Acclaimed by Zionist terrorists, the bomb explosion which took nearly 100 lives in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem has apparently dampened the sympathy of many American Jews for the militant Zionist movement. Jewish public influence on the Administration for a prompt Palestine settlement seems to have diminished, to judge by the press. But, while open pressure has declined, behind-the-scenes pressure has redoubled. "It's greater than it has ever been", say State Department circles. Important figures in the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations, together with representatives of all the important Zionist organizations, have visited the White House in regard to this matter. The target of this renewed drive is the proposal of the joint Anglo-American commission on Palestine for a "federalization" or "partition" of that troubled land.

President Truman is indeed on a difficult spot. He is moved by a desire to cooperate with London. He is worried about the Russian intrigues in the Near East. Advices from Moscow say that Moslem leaders have recently given several much-publicized lectures in that capital, all in favor of the Arab thesis on Palestine. It is feared that Russia will make a deal with the Arab League. On the other hand, the President's chief political advisers warn him of the dangers facing the Democratic Party in the fall elections. Boss Hannegan has told the President that the Democrats may lose the House. The New York delegation is particularly worried. Failure to heed the above mentioned pressure, it is suggested, may cost the Democrats many precious Jewish votes. The Ides of November indeed constitute a potent argument in foreign as well as domestic politics.

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Although OPA has lifted ceilings on cotton goods and other products, some seasoned observers in Washington (in contrast to many others who are highly optimistic) preserve a suspicious "wait and see" attitude towards that organization. Most of the old doctrinaire administrators still occupy key posts and these men who long opposed many legitimate business petitions reportedly display unruffled confidence in their ability to maintain controls indefinitely. The controversy between OPA and

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shoe manufacturers is cited as a warning example.

Be that as it may, all observers are agreed that a very significant index of the future of OPA will be obtainable on August 21. On that date the new decontrol commission must decide whether to remove meat, eggs, dairy products, soy beans and cottonseed oil permanently from OPA control. These items are now provisionally on the free market. It is important to realize that they will revert automatically to control, unless the decontrol commission takes the positive step of freeing them. Now the commission may hesitate before taking the responsibility for such an important decision. It may well weigh the fact that Congress in the present OPA statute envisaged the possible necessity for again returning these items to control; in contrast to the bill vetoed June 29 which provided specifically for their freedom from control. This buck-passing by the legislative body may impress the commission, especially if discontent over high food prices is rising. The way the commission acts on this vital issue should provide a reliable indication of the course it will subsequently follow. The acid test is yet to come.

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The reports from Stockholm that V-Bombs have been observed flying over Swedish territory throw a new and vivid light, not on Russian possession and use of this new weapon of war, but on Russian use of it for diplomatic purposes. Army circles here say that Russian capture of the German V-Bomb base in Peenemünde is an old story, and that it has been long known that captured German scientists have been working on these bombs for the Red Army. But it is pointed out that the bombs, reported by Stockholm, are not being fired solely for experimental purposes. The wide wastes of Siberia would provide ample proving grounds; if that were the main object. The conclusion is that Russia is shooting these bombs into not only Swedish but also Norwegian territory as a warning to those Scandinavian countries lest they feel inclined to join the Western Bloc.

There is no war head in these bombs and there is no explosion or damage in Swedish or Norwegian territory. But the concussion of the bombs on this territory is figuratively heard in the Swedish Ministry of Commerce where the large proposed loan to Russia (see last week's NMG) is under serious, if not anxious, consideration.

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A straw in the prairie wind is the announcement that the Farmers Union, the Left Wing of the farm organizations, is closing its Washington bureau, leaving but one man to handle its Capital business. The Union's headquarters in Denver henceforth will see more of President James G. Patton who will devote his energies to organizing in the "grass roots", instead of influencing Congressmen in Washington. This change may prove an advantageous shift in strategy in the long run, but at present it is interpreted as an admission of failure.

Mr. Patton's retreat is attributed in large part to his changed relations with the White House. The farm leader enjoyed the confidence and assistance of the late President who helped him to obtain much support on Capitol Hill. But after Mr. Roosevelt's death, Patton failed to get along with President Truman and Secretary of Agriculture Anderson. With the side door of the White House no longer open to him, the Farmers Union leader lost influence on the Hill and throughout the country.

Other factors have contributed to the decline of the Union. Farmers, enjoying the recent prosperity, have been less inclined to listen to Patton's Leftist doctrines which also find little favor with M. W. Thatcher, head of the $200,000,000 business of the Farmers Union Grain Terminal Association, and a power in the Union's setup. Finally, in many states -- Nebraska, for example -- there has arisen much opposition to the Patton regime among the increasingly conservative-minded farmers, who dislike Patton's New Deal philosophy and his alliance with the PAC-CIO. Again, as in 1918-20, the political pendulum in rural America is swinging back from radicalism to conservatism, the more quickly because of present farm prosperity.

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Notes and Quotes

As the Big Powers at Paris seek Conference approval of their scissors-and-paste job on the map of Europe, a passage from Harold Nicolson's excellent book, Peace-Making 1919, seems most appropriate. Nicolson, an idealistic young attaché of the British Delegation, describes in his diary (May 15, 1919) his dismay at watching the course of the appeasement policy towards Italy. He fears that the Big Three will pay off that imperialistic power by giving it territorial concessions in the Near East:

"Go round to A. J. B. [Arthur J. Balfour, British Foreign Secretary] after luncheon. And talk to him for a whole hour in this sense. I attack the moral aspect of partitioning Asia Minor. He is tiresome about it. 'All that', he says, 'is quite true. But, my dear young man, you forget that we are now at the Paris Conference. All you say is pure aesthetics'. What is wrong with these experienced statesmen is that they are so used to justifying expediency on moral grounds that they are not convinced by immorality even when it is inexpedient."

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The President has signed the La Follette-Monroney "streamlining Congress" bill which, despite some compromises, largely meets the demands of those who have long advocated reform of Congressional organization. Senator La Follette, writing in the New York Times (August 4), explains why his bill has even wider significance:

"By simplifying its operations, improving its relationships with the Executive branch, and enabling it better to meet its responsibilities under the Constitution, the reorganization of Congress will speed up the legislative process, quicken the solution of our pressing post-war problems, and help the country go forward with confidence into the future.

"The ultimate implications of this proposed reorganization go far beyond the shadow of the Capitol and the Government buildings in Washington. As I see it, the future history of the world will depend in large measure on the success or failure of our representative form of Government in meeting the needs and desires of the people, especially in the crucial years just ahead. It is no secret that two conflicting ideologies are striving for power and favor in the world today. To the extent that we can obtain an efficient and responsive National Legislature that will truly meet the needs of the people, we will help to preserve our own democracy, liberties and form of Government."

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Perhaps the best confession a commentator can make is that he doesn't know it all. As a matter of fact, this column refrains from dealing with many important topics in the news for the simple reason that it has nothing to say that is not being widely said. But in case a flavor of omniscience has crept in, we would like to do penance by quoting with approval the following beautiful sentences from Henry Beston's "Country Chronicle" column in the Progressive (June 17):

"Among the many things for which I remain profoundly grateful is the fact that so much of life defies human explanation. The unimaginative and the dull may insist that they have an explanation for everything, and level at every wonder and mystery of life their popgun formulas but, God be praised, their wooden guns have not yet dislodged the smallest star. It is well that this be so, for the human spirit can die of explanations . . . which do not explain.

"A world without wonder, and a way of mind without wonder, becomes a world without imagination, and without imagination man is a poor and stunted creature. Religion, poetry and all their arts have their sources in this upwelling of wonder and surprise. Let us thank God that so much will forever remain out of reach, safe from our universe, inviolate forever from our touch."

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